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ABSTRACT

A first-grade teacher's classroom investigations support earlier research findings that when dramatic play is presented in a thematic context and related literacy props are provided, the children will use literacy behavior as part of their play. The teacher's research also indicated that adult intervention, guidance, and modeling of literacy behavior, when done carefully, can further encourage literacy. Dramatic changes were noticed in the children's writing with the changes in the dramatic play environment. The frequency of writing in dramatic play went from infrequent to a regular part of the play. When given the opportunity to either select books to read, or to write letters and/or "News of the Day" messages, many children enthusiastically chose the writing opportunities. Of particular interest was the fact that children who were hesitant or reluctant writers were often the most enthusiastic letter writers and news reporters. (Contains 17 references. Six appendixes present student writing samples.) (RS)

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Will an increased print rich environment encourage children to become more involved in writing?

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Research Investigation
by Eileen Bryson

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ABSTRACT

Will children who are provided a print rich environment choose to use literacy in their play or as a free-choice activity? Research findings emphasize that when dramatic play is presented in the context of a theme and related literacy props are provided then children will use literacy behavior as part of their play. Although there is not complete agreement among educators and researchers, there is also strong evidence to support the theory that adult intervention, guidance and modeling of literacy behavior when done carefully can further encourage literacy. My classroom investigation supports these theories. There was a dramatic change in the children's writing with the changes in the dramatic play environment. The frequency of writing in dramatic play went from infrequent to a regular part of the play.

Opinions from well known educators and my personal observations also indicate that a print rich environment will also encourage children to choose writing as a free choice activity. When given the opportunity to either select books to read, or to write letters and/or "News of the Day" messages, many children enthusiastically chose the writing opportunities. Of particular interest was the fact that children who were hesitant or reluctant writers were often the most enthusiastic letter writers and news reporters.

Question: Will an increased print rich environment encourage children to become more involved in writing?

Opportunities for writing occur regularly in my first grade classroom. A special time is set aside for writing where everyone has the opportunity to write imaginative stories, narrative accounts of real life events, etc. Children also write alone and in cooperative groups in response to science explorations or observations and literature. All of the previously described writing opportunities are teacher directed. I am interested in finding out if increased opportunities for writing in voluntary functional writing situations: letters to each other children's, news reporting (News of the Day), and literacy activities in theme oriented print rich environment during dramatic play would encourage more enthusiasm for writing in general.

Researchers have been studying the connection between literacy and dramatic play for a number of years. In their studies many noted theorists have proposed that dramatic play actually encourages children to become writers. Pellegrini, in an article titled "Children's play, language and early literacy", discusses the importance that Jean Piaget placed on symbolic play. For Piaget, the ability of a child to use a doll to represent a baby showed a development of representational skills. "Symbolic representation means using one thing to represent another, as letters are used to represent ideas." (Fields, 1990, p.76) "The same process of consciously assigning meaning to symbols takes place both in dramatic play and in reading."(Harp, 88, p.244) "These skills learned and practiced in play, become the bases, in Piaget's structural theory, for other representational skills, such as using oral and written language."(Pellegrini, 1990, p.76)

Vygotsky, another noted theorist, stressed that early writing begins in symbolic play. "Given the current state of psychological knowledge, our notion that make-believe play, drawing, and writing can be viewed as different moments in an essentially unified process of development of written language will appear to be very much overstated. . . .But experiments and psychological analysis lead us to this very conclusion." (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 116)

As children invent stories and text to go with their play, they also increase their narrative abilities. This type of language experience may, in turn, encourage "imaginative use of language and story schema development" in their own writing (Rosko, 1988, p.565).

It seems that if dramatic play opportunities in addition to allowing children to develop their skills in symbolic play and narrative accounts, also provided an opportunity for children to use reading and writing as a functional part of their play then literacy opportunities would increase dramatically. And in fact, research shows that flooding the environment with literacy props does promote children's involvement in volunteer literacy tasks.

Lesley Morrow and Muriel Rand in "Preparing the Classroom Environment to Promote Literacy during Play" made a very interesting study of children's play. They provided three different settings in three different classrooms for children to use literacy props as part of their play. In the first setting the teacher provided a variety of literacy materials: "paper of different sizes,materials to make books including staplers, construction paper, ready-made blank books, magazines and books, and a variety of writing tools" (Morrow, 1991, p. 148). The classroom teacher described some possible ways these materials could be used. Results of this study showed that there was an increase in literary behavior especially writing. The children however, generally used the literacy props separate from their dramatic play. (Morrow, 1991, p. 150-52)

The second play setting included a theme related dramatic play center. The play area was set up as a veterinarian's office and had many literacy props: medical forms, prescription forms, appointment cards, etc. The teacher mentioned the materials included but did not give guidance as to their use. There was a greater increase in literacy activities in the thematic play center than there had been in the setting where literacy materials were handed out, and no thematic structure was given to the play (Morrow, 1991, 156).

The third play setting was also a veterinarian's office. This time when the center was introduced by the teacher, she explained and modeled how the literacy materials could be used as part of the play. Once play began the teacher still was involved in guiding play by encouraging participation and use of literacy materials. There was a significant

increase in literacy activity in this teacher guided thematic play center over either of the other play settings. (Morrow, 1991, pp. 149-156)

Other researchers have also studied the role of the teacher in dramatic play. In the past, the general feeling held by many educators was that teachers should maintain a "hands off" approach to children's dramatic play. The less intrusion the better. Today, there are educators who continue to feel that teacher's involvement in play prevents children from developing their own themes (Walker, 1992). However, there are many others who feel that teacher involvement enriches children's play by assisting "'nonplayers' to begin engaging in dramatic play", by helping "more proficient players enrich and extend their dramatizations, and by encouraging children to incorporate literacy into their play episodes" (Christie, 1983, Morrow and Rand, 1991). Studies by two important researchers, Vygotsky and Holdaway, support the concept that children learn best with adult support and guidance (Morrow, 1991, p. 147).

Articles by Christie, Morrow, Nourot, and Jones all do an excellent job of further describing the different roles teachers may assume which help stimulate creative, literacy rich play. Teachers can help children from "outside" the play by providing and encouraging use of literacy props, and by encouraging children to become involved and helping them find appropriate ways and roles to "join in' the play. "Inside" involvement on the teacher's part would include modeling the use of literacy props as an active participant in the play (Christie, 1990, Morrow,1991, Nourot,1991, Jones, 1992).

Researchers and educators alike, however, have warned that teacher intervention should be in the "least obtrusive manner possible" (Nourot, 1991, p. 47). James Christie stresses that "outside and inside interventions should be used sparingly. If teachers intervene too often in children's play, the children lose control of the activity and it ceases to be play. . . Adults should intervene only when play is faltering or when there is a clear opportunity for enrichment. Once children start exhibiting the desired behaviors in their play," then Christie recommends, "teacher intervention should be quickly phased out" (Christie, 1990, p. 542).

Kathleen Roskos, in "Literacy at work in play" also talks about a literary stance in the sense of children's awareness and understanding of literacy. By using literacy in their play children behave like readers and writers and, in my mind, become aware of the importance of being

literate in everyday life. In addition, teachers can evaluate the progress children are making in their understanding of the "purposes and technicalities of written language" (Roskos, 1988).

Dorothy Strickland reinforces the idea that literacy opportunities in free-play encourages "spontaneous, voluntary, functional uses for reading and writing. It creates a need and desire to read and write. . . " (Strickland, 1989, p. 179) . Children want to read and write because it is fun, and there is a purpose for the writing.

In setting up dramatic play opportunities for children, "time" is also a very important factor to consider. James Christie in an article entitled, "How Much Time is Needed for Play?" noted that children whose play was limited to less than one half hour, did not become involved in elaborate role playing. They tended to "wander around more and not get involved in play at all." Allowing more time for play provided opportunities for children to recruit players and allowed reluctant children" time to become involved in the play (Christie, 1992, pp. 28-31).

A Look at the Dramatic Play Opportunities

All the preceding research had convinced me that I could encourage more literacy activity if I provided theme related literacy props in the dramatic play and discretely guided children in the use of the props. But first a look at dramatic play opportunities before the "change".

Children in my class had opportunities for open-ended dramatic play at the "Drama Center" one of the many choices during a half hour free choice center time. The drama center had limited props consisting of a box with hats (fishing style, caps, etc.), aprons, a few cups, silverware, sunglasses, scarves, purses, and a telephone. The children often picked this area and would frequently play out family type situations. Occasionally, the boys would pretend to be rock stars, or act out current popular movies (Mrs. Doubtfire). The play was not always connected. There were no literacy props available, and no one chose to use literacy materials as part of the play.

A second dramatic play opportunity during center time was a "school". Supplies for the school included chalkboards, chalk, erasers, a changing variety of games (lotto, theme related concentrations games,

etc.) Children were also invited to select other materials: books, paper, pencils, etc. These materials were not set up as part of the play, but available in the classroom. Students also enjoyed this center, and the role of teacher was highly prized (by the girls). Boys tended to be incorrigible students whom the teacher had to keep in line. Play included modeling the teacher and direct instruction classes. There was some writing that went on during the play, but it was sporadic and depended on the "teacher" of the day. I did not guide the play or provide additional school literacy props.

Changes

I discovered that even a minimal direction by the teachers to use literacy props can make for long term changes in children's literacy behavior. At a playdough center first graders were busily making "food" for people to eat. I suggested that they might want to write down the kind of food they were making with the cost of each item included. I brought paper and pencils over to them. They were very excited about writing down the different items and their costs. Since that the day the children have written down the food they've had for sale without teacher guidance. Sometimes the literacy props have been provided, and sometimes the children had to go get the paper and pencils themselves. The children involved in the playdough food play have been children with both developing and advanced writing skills. They have eagerly written down their items for sale with almost no hesitation. Krystal, a frequent participant, showed delight in writing down what she has made. During writing folder time she has great difficulty getting started writing down anything and seems to worry about how to spell things. (See Appendix A for samples of food items for sale.)

Veterinarian Dramatic Play

Prior to my research project investigation, I had experimented with setting up a veterinarian's office, and the theme related play and added literacy props encouraged a lot of children to include writing as part of their play as they wrote prescriptions, gave advice on animal care, etc.. Next year, I plan to do more modeling of all the literacy opportunities in a veterinarians office. I'll take care to only model for only short times to show the use of literacy props,and then quickly exit from play. I loved the idea of owners reading books to their pets, and secretaries keeping track of appointments, etc.(Strickland, 1989, p.178) From this initial experience with me giving directions about play, I also discovered that I

need to be careful about how dogmatic I sound in suggesting reading and writing activities. One little boy wanted to know if he "had" to write things down as he played. This is the same little boy, Ty, who is the only child who did not participate in the restaurant dramatic play. Christie's warning of too much intervention comes to mind. (Appendix B shows some examples of literacy during Vet. play.)

Paleontology Dramatic Play

A second attempt on my part to provide a literacy rich environment during dramatic play met with mixed success. We had been studying dinosaurs, and I thought that a paleontology center would be a good thematic play center to have during our study. I provided props for the actual "dig": shovels, brushes, chisels (wooden chop sticks), measuring tapes, magnifying glasses, and rulers. Field logs for notes about discoveries, and dinosaur books with alphabetical descriptions of many dinosaurs were included in the play. No bones were provided, but plasticene clay was out for children to make bones to discover. Children showed initial enthusiasm for this center, but seemed to enjoy the making of bones more than discovering them and writing about the discoveries. With the exception of two students all children used their logs to write down their discoveries, and several used the measuring tape and rulers to find out how long the bones were. Two children thumbed through the dinosaur books to look for dinosaurs who might belong to the bones. I encouraged literacy behavior by asking the children what they thought they had found and suggesting that they take notes in their logs. Ty spent his whole time making wonderful thigh bones for tyrannosaurus and a skull for styracosaurus complete with multiple horns. After the children had visited the paleontology center once, they were not particularly eager to return. This lack of enthusiasm was perhaps, in part, a result of not knowing how paleontologists work.

Since the dinosaur unit has been probably the most exciting theme study for my first graders, I would like to try a dramatic play center again next year. I have been thinking of ways to make the play more relevant and therefore more interesting to the children. I have also begun thinking of ways to provide more literacy materials. Elizabeth Jones points out that "if children are to become skilled representers, they must have meaningful experiences to represent." (Jones, 1990, p.12) The children need to see and read about how paleontologist work. Aliki's *Digging up Dinosaurs* comes to mind. And the children's pretend digging needs to be

more exciting--Maybe I'll be able to borrow the sand table from the kindergarten room next door and encourage the children dig through damp sand to find the bones. More literacy props could be added by having the auxiliary units included. Someone would need to prepare food for the paleontologists, so menus, and grocery lists would need to be made and a camp kitchen set up. Some one else might put the bones together and perhaps write a description of the finds. I have a regular invention center where children create a variety of things out of recycled materials and then write about them. This center could be commandeered for a few weeks for the creation of dinosaurs and other prehistoric creatures. (Appendix C shows examples of literacy during Paleontology play.)

Restaurant Dramatic Play

The final dramatic play setting with a literacy rich environment was a restaurant. I had provided opportunities in the past years for fast food restaurants (a McDonald's and a Dairy Queen), and had all the props ready and available complete with menus already written up and boxes to check the kind of food to be purchased. The prices were even on the order pads and I had money for the children to use to pay the exact amounts indicated. There was no need for children to write on their own. All the work (or play) had already been done for them.

Luckily for the children and for me, I didn't use any of these props. Instead, I provided blank menus, playdough for the food, and blank order pads for the waiters. All the writing would need to be done by the children.

Immediate interest was sparked when I put a table cloth and fabric napkins on one of the tables. Children guessed it was restaurant. I explained that in restaurants customers needed to have menus so they could find out what was available to eat. I showed the children the blank menus, and we talked about what kind of food the restaurant would serve. I briefly described the job of cashier, pointed out where the cashier would be located (a separate, movable computer table) and mentioned that the cashier could take orders to go, as well as collect the play money from the customers. I suggested that there could also be chefs who prepared the food at a table close by.

Before play began I asked the children what kinds of signs would be important to have for the restaurant. I had already made a sign labeled "Restaurant". Racheal said we needed an "Open" sign which she volunteered to make. Ryan, a reluctant writer, said we needed a "Closd"

sign which he proceeded to make and then hide behind the "Open" sign. (These signs were carefully displayed each play period.) Taylor thought we should have a real name for the restaurant, and asked me for advice. I asked him what kind of food they were going to serve. He said "all kinds". He then decided to name it "Red Robon" since, as he told me, he'd "been to that restaurant in Anchorage before."

As play began I realized that the waiters also needed order pads, which I quickly provided.

Crystal, who decided to be a cook, made a sign limiting the "ckicin" to "koocs onle and watrs ". Already, this dramatic play center had children involved in more spontaneous literacy activities than at any other time through out the year.

It was exciting to watch the children take on the roles of the different characters. Crystal tucked her shirt in and then stuffed her order pad in by her waist. Taylor lifted his tray (paper plate) high above his head as he brought the food to the table. Amanda, a dissatisfied customer, complained about her food and demanded that it be taken back to the kitchen since she had ordered a LARGE pizza, and her serving certainly wasn't large.

It was also exciting to see children using reading, writing, and speaking confidently and purposefully as they made up menus and wrote down orders, prepared food, read menus, and ordered food. Krystal proudly stated that she had written "Pizza" on her menu. I asked her how she figured it out, and she said "I did sound spelling for pizza. She also pointed out that there was a "Happy pizza" on the menu. I asked her how she made it and she said that you just "have a plain old pizza, and you put a smile on it." A few minutes later she came back to tell me, "We have a new mad pizza." When I asked her if it had been added to the menu, she said, "I'll write it right now." (and she did!).

John, who has just begun to blossom as a writer, especially enjoyed handling all the money as a cashier, and I encouraged him to write down a "To Go" order for me on the order pad. Ryan was concerned that we didn't have any bills-just change and made several twenty, and hundred dollar bills.

The first graders also changed their manner of speaking and used a bit of "restaurantese' 'How do you do?", "and what would you like to drink?" "Just a second, Miss", "Cheese Pizza ready!" etc.

As the days went on the children's enthusiasm for the restaurant

continued. In order to maintain the enthusiasm, provide more literacy props, and draw a few children back into the play, I provided new play dough for the restaurant food and suggested that a bakery could work in partnership with the restaurant by providing food for them. I also added recipe books to the restaurant and bread and cookie recipe books to the bakery along with half of the new play dough. I had also just gotten some plastic food from a garage sale which was a real hit.

On this particular day, the day the video was made, all but two children were involved in the restaurant dramatic play as cooks, cashiers, waiters, and bakery workers. There were no customers, so I joined in the play. It was fun, as you can see from the video, but I feel that I stayed in the play too long and should have removed myself after other customers arrived at the restaurant. I somewhat monopolized conversation, and prevented some interaction between children. My intervention was not done "in the least obtrusive manner possible" (Nourot, 1991, p.47), and I have a video to remind me to do a better job of intervention the next time.

It's amazing what a good evaluation tool a video can be. The video also showed me that children were restless as I presented the different possibilities for writing before play began. This section of the video was deleted, as it wasn't particularly interesting to watch either. Next time, I will make suggestions for additional literacy behavior more gradually, over a period of days and perhaps model some of these behaviors instead of talking about them all at once. It would be easy for me to write down on our dry erase easel a "special of the day", and I could show the chefs how to keep a list of needed food and supplies by verbalizing what I ran out of and then writing it down on a grocery list. Once this modeling was done, I could then exit the play and let the children use the new literacy behaviors on their own. It would also be fun to encourage the chefs to write down some of their favorite recipes in a Red Robon recipe book.

The restaurant dramatic play setting was the most successful of all the settings attempted in getting children to use literacy as part of their play. Estin, who spends the majority of his writing folder time drawing and struggles with writing, very contentedly wrote down items for sale in the bakery. Rebecca who just arrived in our class two weeks ago, happily took on the role of waiter. She appears to have very limited reading skills, but is very successful in using invented spelling to write down customers' orders. Ryan and John, also hesitant writers enjoyed opportunities to become involved in the dramatic play and used literacy

behaviors as cashiers, money makers, waiters, and bakers. Krystal chose the restaurant center every day and used literacy regularly in her play. Her enthusiasm for writing and her ability to write down orders in a timely manner was impressive. Krystal's writing during writing folder time is much less fluent. Those more fluent writers showed equal enjoyment in writing. They were creative menu writers and wrote down very complete orders for the customers. Every child except for one was involved in the restaurant play, and the majority of children were daily participants during the three week time that the restaurant was open.

The success of the "Red Robon" can be attributed to several factors. There were many opportunities for children to use writing functionally in their play. Literacy materials were readily available and a relevant part of the play. Children were given directions about how to use the literacy materials, and literacy behavior was modeled by the teacher. The thematic play setting was familiar to the children, and they could take on the roles easily and confidently. It was obvious to me that Estin who struggles with writing at other times during the day was very confident of his writing ability as a baker.

Another contributing factor to the children's involvement in the play may have been my suspension of a rule to select a different center each day. Children could continue with their play each day, and the results of the restaurant play makes me think that my "change each day" rule is perhaps a rule I want to discontinue. I had instituted the rule after some children were choosing the block area exclusively, but need to think, instead, of ways to encourage occasional selection of play in other areas, and of ways to bring literacy into the block center. The opportunity to continue play from day to day in the restaurant encouraged more sophisticated play and allowed for children to try out the many different roles.

Teacher guidance is also definitely a contributing factor in encouraging literacy behavior. The importance of such guidance was brought home to me on the day I had a substitute teacher for my class. In her notes about the dramatic play, she said that the children had really loved it, but weren't involved in much writing. I was somewhat surprised since the day before the children had been busily writing menus, taking orders, etc. When I returned to class the following day one little girl said that she wasn't using the order pad, because she could just "remember everything". I emphasized the waiters always write down what people

order so they won't forget and get orders mixed up. My explanation must have seemed logical to Jenna as she went back to writing up orders.

Other Print Rich Writing Opportunities

In my initial inquiry I was interested in looking at ways to provide opportunities for voluntary functional writing through a print rich environment . I have already discussed the many opportunities and successes for functional writing in a print rich, dramatic play environment Now, let's take a look at the children's response to opportunities for writing letters and messages or "news".

What do noted educators and researchers say about what inspires writers to write?

In *What's Whole in Whole Language*, Ken Goodman talks about what makes language (reading, writing, speaking) easy.
"It's easy when: It's real and natural. It's whole. It's sensible. It's interesting. It's relevant. It belongs to the learner. It's part of a real event. It has social utility. It has purpose for the learner. The learner chooses to use it. It's accessible to the learner. The learner has power to use it" (Goodman, 1986, p. 8). Goodman's above list of how to make language easy for children would describe the writing which goes on during dramatic play, but also would give good reasons to promote the writing of letters and messages.

Regie Routman, in *Invitations*, also talks about the importance of making writing relevant and purposeful. "The writing that goes on in the classroom must be relevant to the students if they are going to become engaged in and value the process." (Routman, 1991, p.170) In her own teaching, Routman found the value of letter or note writing and commented on how "thrilled" children were to receive and answer mail. Routman (1988, p. 105).

In *The Author's Chair and Beyond*, Ellen Blackburn Karelitz collected and studied children's use of notes and concluded that not only was note taking a popular activity but her "'regular note writers' were often students who struggled with narrative writing. . . Because these notes were written for a specific purpose, the topic is implicit in the situation that prompted the note. Children did not have to search their memories for experiences to write about. These reluctant readers gained confidence in their writing abilities by writing notes" (Karelitz, 1993, p. 151).

Both the letter writing opportunities and the "News of the Day" writing began as whole group teacher directed activities so every child would have a chance to get and receive letters and write important information (news) to share with the class.

Letter Writing

The post office consisted of cubbies labeled with each child's name. There also had recycled envelopes and advertisement stamps that could be used. To make sure everyone wrote and received a letter, children selected a mystery partner stick and wrote a secret letter to the person whose name who was on the stick. There was great enthusiasm for the letter writing activity by all children, and it was interesting to note that those children who balked at writing during writing folder time were equally enthusiastic. This enthusiasm continued when the letter writing became an optional "first thing" in the morning activity. Children could also spend time looking at and reading books of all different sorts. Some children chose to write to a specific person while others continued to enjoy getting a mystery person to write to. One little girl wrote ten letters to mystery people during a half an hour's time.

Amanda, who did not always write a great deal during writing folder time, seemed to love the opportunity to write and get responses from others in her letters. Her letters were interesting and always requested responses from others. After the post office opened, she also expanded her letter writing to include me and would bring me notes from home that she had written on a computer or ones that she had done by hand. I would respond in note form which seemed to inspire her to continue writing more. (Appendix D shows examples of some of Amanda's letters and notes)

Ryan, who spent most of his writing folder time, drawing elaborate pictures, also seemed to enjoy the writing for a specific purpose as did John, who began to write long letters. Almost simultaneously, John began to spend his whole time during writing folders in composition. Previous to the introduction of letter writing he had spent the majority of writing folder time drawing pictures.

News of the Day

The "News of the Day" writing was also very popular with the class. It also began as a whole class activity. Each child was asked to write down some news that s/he would like to share with the class. Later in the day children then had an opportunity to read their news to the class.

News consisted of things children had done at home, news that they had heard about on T.V. or from parents, play plans they had made, etc.

When the "News of the Day" became a free choice activity, again as a morning activity, children continued to write enthusiastically. (See Appendix E for examples of 'News of the Day")

Ryan never missed a day to tell what had happened at home. "Idintitgo to skow Beykus my Boos wr wet. (I didn't go to school because my boots were wet.) "I kot wun u my rabits" "I got grad (grounded)for ksn" (cussing) "I had to say in my room." "I wit hom rley yerday."

Amanda seemed to enjoy the News of the Day almost as much as letter writing and would share a variety of news. "I hrd on the noos las nit that Kayla's dad got hur inthe iksplsin (explosion) thay took Him to acrig thay are wrking on His lse" "I am mooving to Mishagin." "Yestr Day my big sistrs Horses sham got cot on BarBewire he got cat on the lag. he is ok."

Gruff, who is just beginning to feel comfortable writing, especially enjoyed writing and sharing news as did Ty and Estin, both who are just beginning to blossom as writers. Ty's and Estin's writing was difficult for me to read, but they had no trouble reading it to me and the rest of the class if it was done soon after the writing. Ty had avoided play in the restaurant, perhaps because of the literacy component. He was the one who asked me if you "had to write" but was willing to write "News of the Day" on his own fairly often. And although Ryan, and Gruff were participants in dramatic play, they spent more writing time with their news and letters.

Why were letter writing and "News of the Day" so appealing to the first graders, especially to those who were hesitant or reluctant writers during writing folder time? Children probably enjoyed the immediate feed back they received for their effort. The person who received their letters gave them oral or written responses. Children who were writers of news had an opportunity to read their news to the whole class. In Ryan's case I think he relished the personal attention he received from me and the class by reading his news. Unfortunately, there wasn't as much immediate feed back for stories at writing folder time. At the beginning of the year the children had frequent opportunities to share their stories with the class. As time went on, however, we got busy with other things and there were not as many opportunities to share. Next year I am determined that time will be found for "author sharing" as well as "news

sharing" all year long.

Ellen Blackburn Karelitz noted that her less successful writers seemed to enjoy writing notes because the topics were specific and children didn't have to pull information from their memory. In both letter writing and News my students also have a chance to write on specific topics. They seemed to know exactly what to write and could do so quickly and successfully.

Letter writing also had an extra appeal to children because they could interact with other children.

Conclusion

As a result of my investigations into the literacy opportunities in print rich environments, I will definitely change my classroom next year. I have discovered that there is great potential for encouraging children's use and understanding of literacy in dramatic play.

Before my investigation I felt that dramatic play among other things provided opportunities for children to learn positive social skills, offered opportunities for language development and understanding, and allowed children opportunities to create stories of their own.

Now I realize that dramatic play offers this and much more. Children, in the process of play, use representation as they pretend one thing(a block) is something else a (calculator) which in turn helps them use letters and words to represent their ideas (Fields, 1995, p. 32). "The more a child engages in symbolic play, the greater is his or her ability to create representations-both in play and in reading (Harp, 1988, p. 244). Dramatic play also gives children opportunities to enthusiastically use reading, speaking and writing in functional situations. Literacy opportunities for children during dramatic play are plentiful when a thematic setting is provided, appropriate literacy props are readily available, and teacher guidance is given as to their use.

I will no longer hand children a box of dramatic play materials containing mostly clothes and send them on their way to create their own play. Instead I will try to weave the dramatic play opportunities into themes studied in class or themes children are familiar with and provide appropriate literacy materials to use during play.

And I will no longer use "center time" to give individual assistance to children having difficulties with reading or writing. Instead I'll encourage reading and writing in the dramatic play center through suggestions on how to use literacy props and by modeling literacy

behavior.

This year the thematic dramatic play opportunities happened at the end of the year, because I was not aware of the value of them. Next year I am very excited about giving children opportunities 2:34 PMto use literacy in dramatic play from the very first day of school. Children will see themselves as writers and readers with the need to communicate with each other. It will be interesting to see if the opportunity to use writing regularly as part of dramatic play will make children more confident writers during writing folder time.

I will also begin next year with more open-ended free choice opportunities to write. The children's enthusiasm for "News of the Day" and letter writing encourages me to use both activities next year. Letters and News give first graders real reasons for writing. Children are able to write about things important to them and get quick feed back from their peers and teacher.

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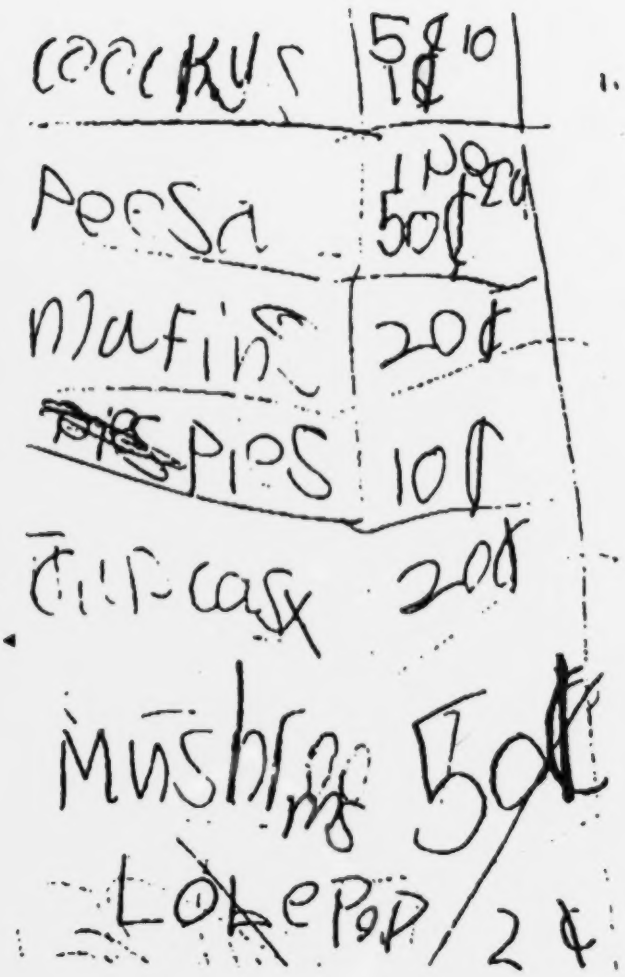
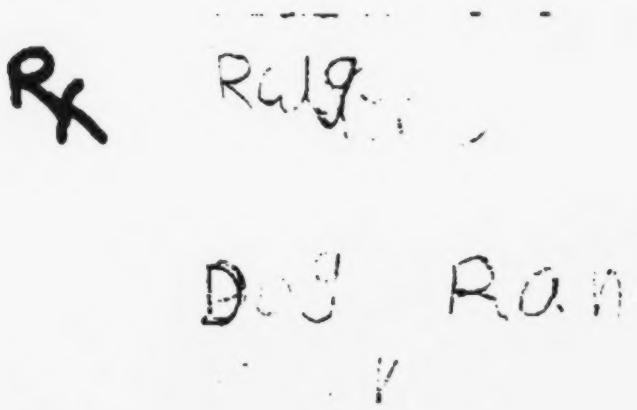
Appendix A



Menus at the bakery.

Appendix B



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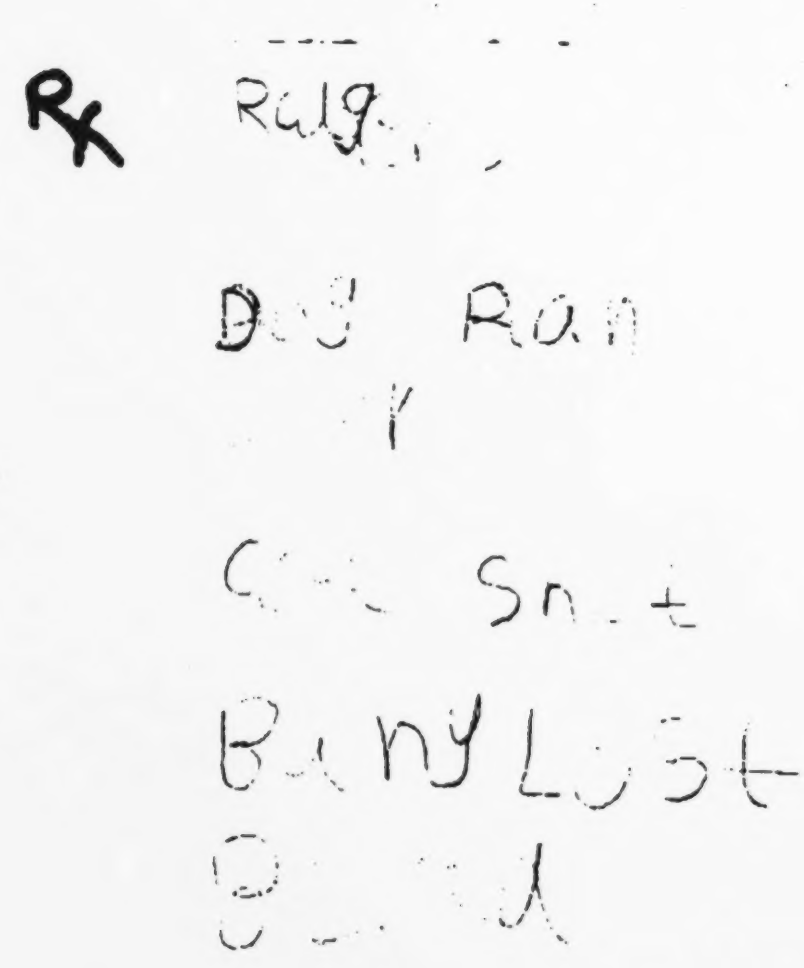
Appendix B



Veterinarian Care

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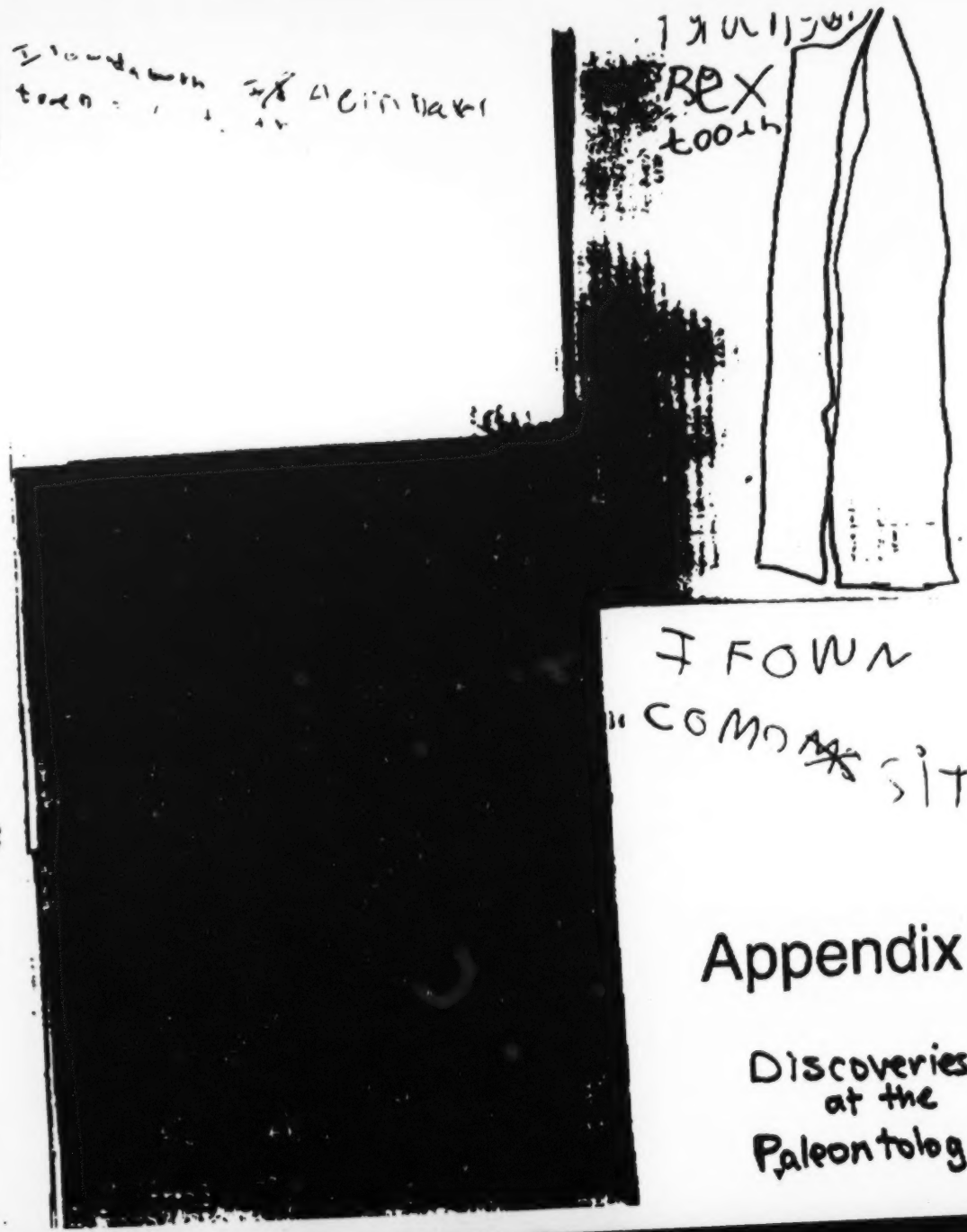

I found a
T-rex
tooth

first I found a
tooth It was
3 inches

I FOWN
a COMO sith is

23

Albinitasaurus
Head

24

Tranasaurus
Tooth

Appendix C

Discoveries
at the
Paleontology Center

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Appendix D

John

Letters by Amanda

[illegible]

I [illegible] Fan it was Fun

kicking so weed.

And F[illegible] Driving in [illegible]

An[illegible] Fan Gu[illegible]

[illegible]

An[illegible] [illegible] and sc[illegible]

And [illegible]

Thanks a bunch!
For Teaching
me all
thees nice
Thing's
love
Amanda
Rodgers

You are great

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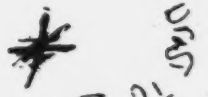
Appendix E

News of the Day



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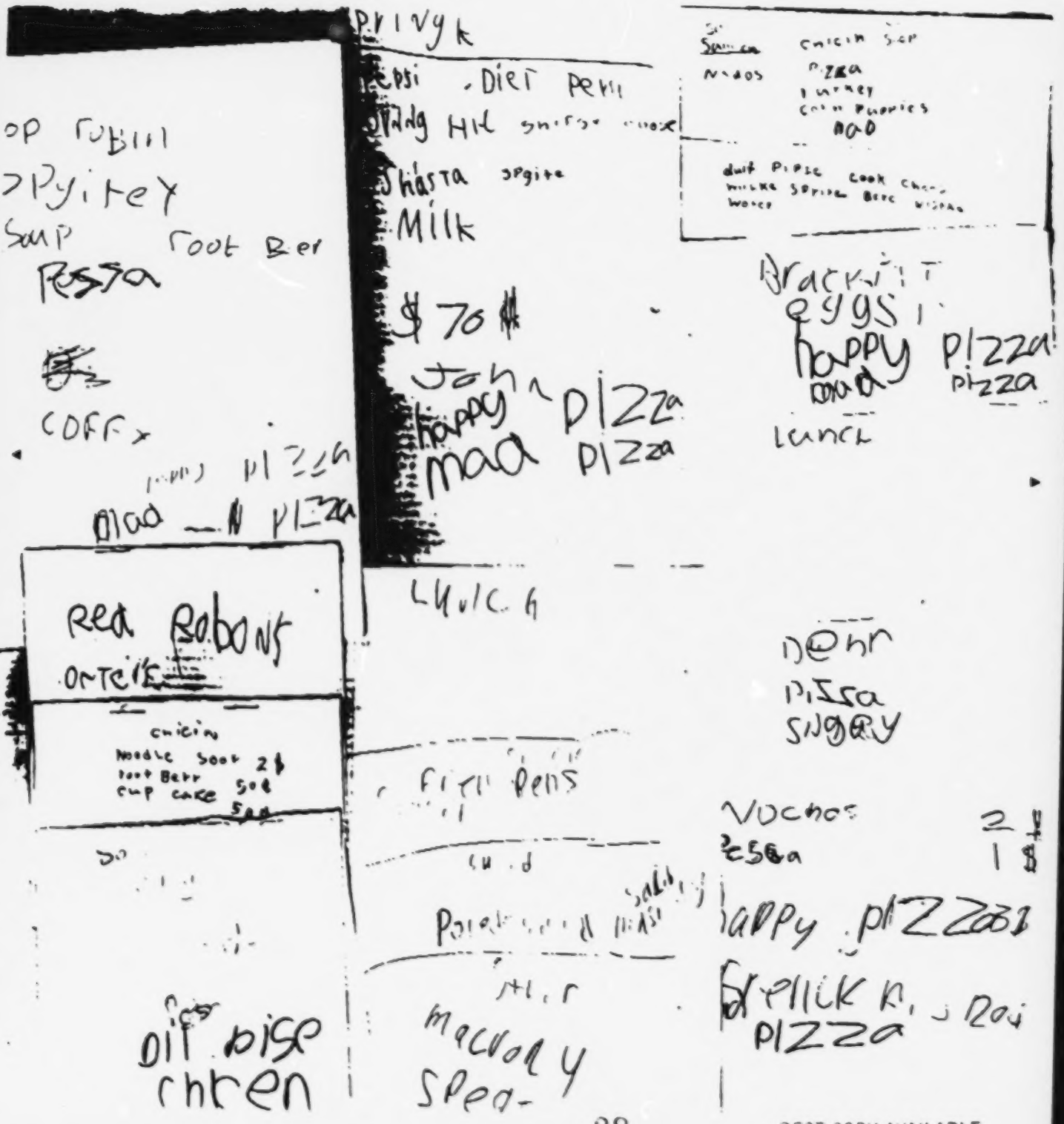
Appendix F

Menus and Orders at the Red Robin



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